advance you some money. In fact I will make sure that they do so."

"It is very kind of you to . . say that," Luella said, "especially when I have brought you so much . . trouble." She saw the Duke's eyes harden and said quickly: "But you do believe now that I had . . no part in this . . deception?"

"Of course I believe you, now that I have had time to talk to you," the Duke replied. "But you had a very narrow escape, Miss Hanley, from being drugged and finding yourself in a dreadful place from which you could never escape."

He stopped speaking to look at her very seriously: "You must never again – and I mean never again – walk about the streets of a foreign city alone, or get into conversation with a strange man – however pleasant he may appear to be."

"It was . . very, very . . foolish . . of me," Luella admitted, "and I know now that Papa would have been very . . angry indeed, if he . . knew what . . happened."

"I think that your father would have been grateful that, by the mercy of God, you escaped," the Duke said, "and at least for tonight, at any rate, you can sleep without being afraid."

"Does that mean you will allow me to stay here?" Luella asked. "Oh, thank you . . thank you. I thought the courier was going to give me some . . money which Signor Vecchio had promised." She gave a deep sigh and added: "But he drove away without telling me he was going to do so, and now I think it was Signor Vecchio

who intended to make sure that I should be left . . penniless."

"I am quite certain that is what he planned," the Duke said. "The man is an evil monster, and that is why, Miss Hanley, we have to fight him with every weapon we have at our disposal."

As the Duke finished speaking, he looked at the clock over the mantelpiece. "It is growing late," he said, "and I am sure you are hungry. I hope you will give me the pleasure of dining with me."

Luella rose from the sofa. "If you are . . sure that is what . . you want."

"I was dining alone," the Duke said, "because I have been very busy all day organising improvements to the estate. I expect by this time your luggage will have gone upstairs and I would like, if it is possible, to put back dinner for no more than twenty minutes."

Luella gave a little laugh. "I can be quicker than that."

"Very well," the Duke smiled. "That is a challenge!" He walked to the door and opened it.

Luella was not surprised to see that Bates, the butler, was standing just outside. "I was waiting to tell Your Grace," he said, as the Duke appeared, "that the little boy has eaten a large meal, and Mrs Moore has taken him upstairs to bed."

"I promised I would go up and say goodnight to him," Luella said.

The Duke turned to the butler. "Take Miss Hanley upstairs," he said, "and order dinner to be ready at eight-thirty."